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Professor Rahimi

Writing 60

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Abolish the Prison, Replace the Prison

REFLECTION:

For this project, we wanted to take a more creative approach to some possible approaches to prison abolition that we had discussed and researched about. From the start, we knew our main arguments were going to be that reform would not be a strong enough change and that abolition would need to look like a series of new systems to replace prisons. From there, we mostly used our combined CP research for the first zine which sets up the prison issue. Here we were able to continue the dialogue with our previous authors (Davis, Gilmore, etc.) while adding in the new queer anti-carceral authors like Bassichis and Girshick. From there, most of our research was for the second zine that focused on concrete examples of abolitionist alternatives. Andy is from Oregon, so he knew that Oregon passed a law decriminalizing certain drugs which we looked into as one solution. The other alternatives were solutions we looked into after reading multiple authors reference them like Davis and Bassichis. After compiling all our research and organizing it into a flowing, digestible form, we were ready to start creating the zines.

To aid our creative process, we first talked with both Eli's high school civics teacher, a vocal prison abolitionist who had experience making political posters and infographics, and Eli's father, who is a graphic designer that taught us how to be argumentative in a creative format. With their advice, we were able to come up with two

complementary color filters that we applied to images that related to our content in the zines. We tried to make sure to add as many photos of the abolitionist authors as possible to convey how our arguments heavily pulled from these writers. All of this was done in Adobe InDesign, a software that is popular amongst actual magazine creators.

ABOLISH THE PRISON



As it stands, the United States prison system is *unjust, ineffective, racist*, and it serves to *perpetuate systemic racism and capitalism*.

It must be abolished.

We have argued already as to why this system is so racist and in need of change, in our CP essays. These zines are going to focus on advocating for a better system to replace prisons with. Starting firstly:



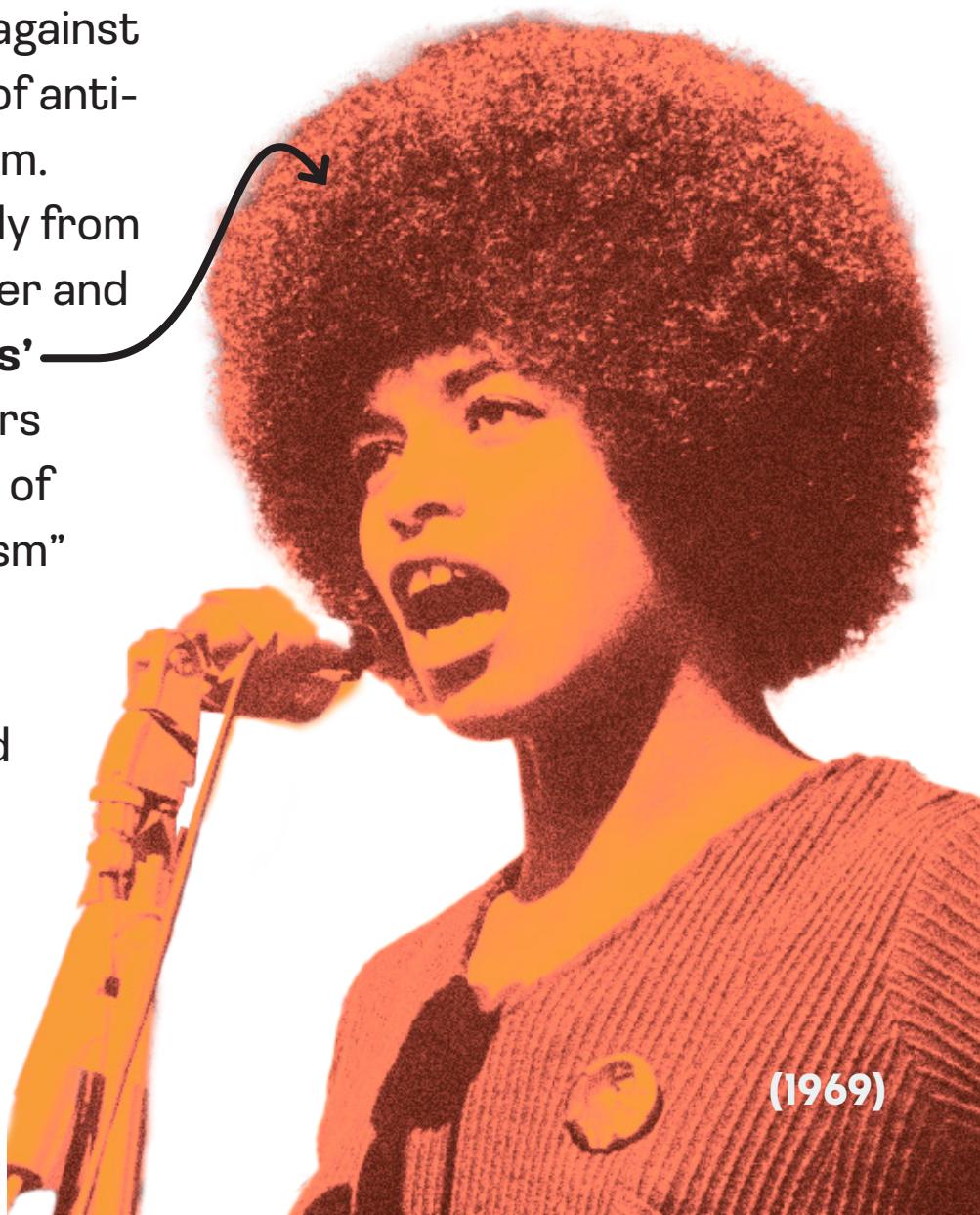
THE PRISON

It is important to be on the same page about definitions even as simple as what prisons are. In his CP essay, Fleischer has argued why the prison is

a system to remove individuals from society that do not behave with the status quo, which in America today is largely defined by capitalism and systemic racism

He describes how, contrary to the common belief that prisons are full of dangerous people, prisons actually serve as a place to hold people who go against the powerful systems of anti-blackness and capitalism.

Here he is pulling greatly from prison abolitionist writer and advocate **Angela Davis'** argument that prisoners are often the “detritus of contemporary capitalism” (16). Davis also argues that people in prison are not necessarily bad individuals, they are individuals who have been wronged by the system.

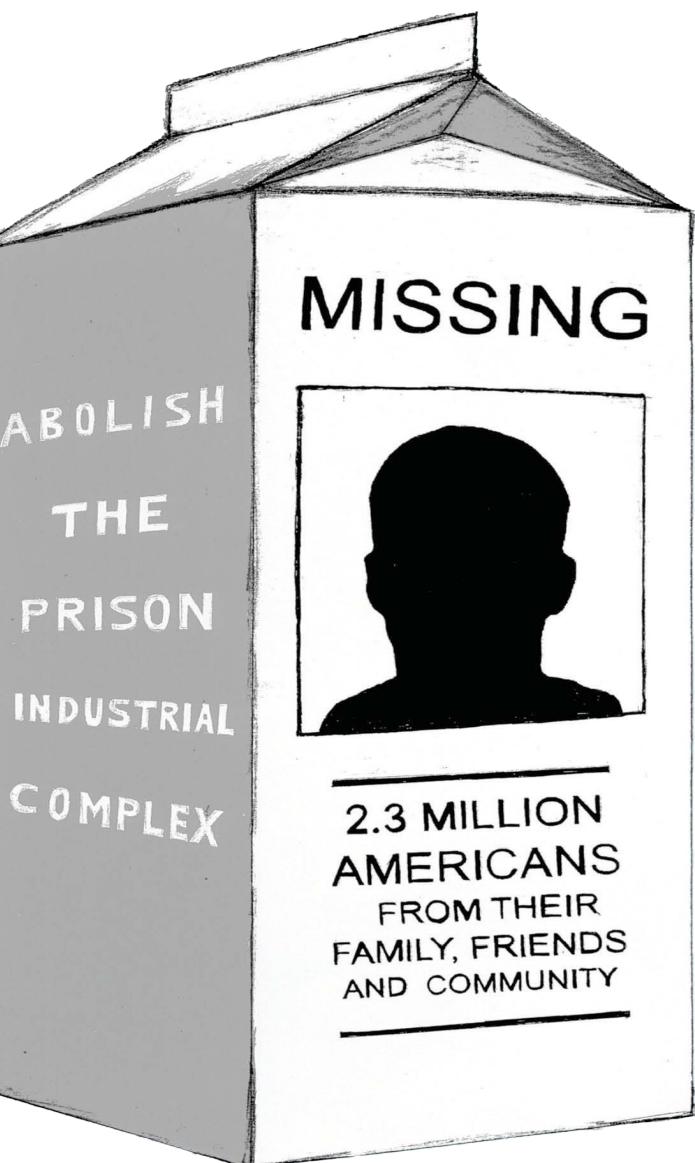


(1969)

ABOLITION

Abolition is a complex solution to the prison problem that is going to require a lot of time and effort to build new systems that can replace the prison. Davis describes that because the modern prison-industrial complex is so massive and serves many functions, declaring

[we must] let go of the desire to discover one single alternative system of punishment that would occupy the same footprint as the prison system (106).

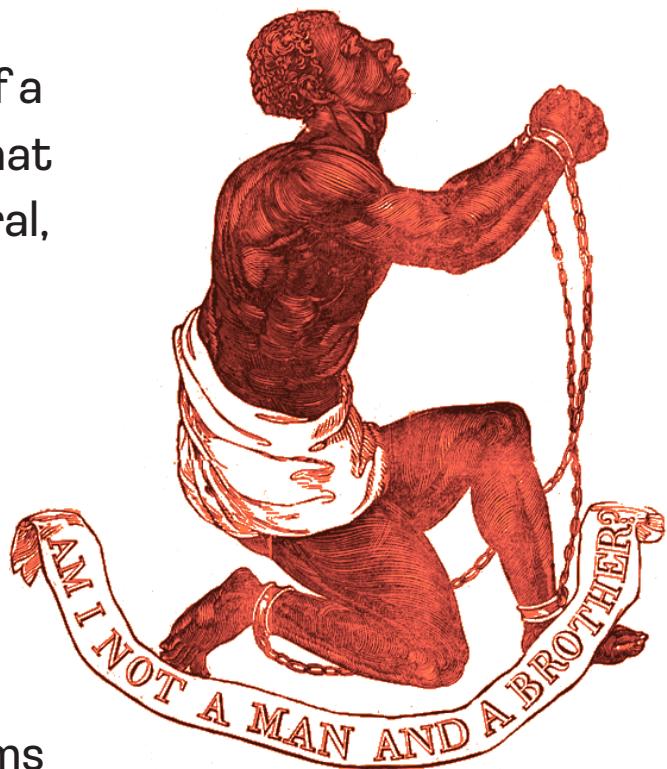


In the next zine, ***Replace the Prison***, we will discuss some concrete examples of alternative systems that could replace our prisons now. It is however important to keep in mind that while abolition is not about trying to take down prisons overnight, the purpose is indeed to definitively remove prisons entirely.

REFORM ?

Many people will argue that abolition sounds too extreme of a solution, perhaps contending that reforming prisons is more natural, politically effective, or safe.

But when one considers the historical systems of chattel slavery, sharecropping, convict leasing, and more that lead directly to the U.S. prison system today (Fleischer 3), it is clear now how these systems needed to be fully abolished rather than simply reformed. Focusing on prisons now, basic reforms such as lighter sentencing or abolishing the death penalty miss the greater point. Prisons are not wrong because their punishments are too harsh or unfair, the entire system is wrong.



Juvenile children bought to serve as farmers



Older activist movements such as the LGBT movements of the 1960's also supported abolishing police, prisons, capitalism, and more to achieve the freedom they needed. Queer and trans writers **Morgan Bassichis**, **Dean Spade**, and **Alexander Lee** describe how, somewhere along the line, the LGBT movement started working with these systems and only asking for small reforms (16). They also differentiate what solutions these new movements are pushing for from the more radical approaches, in a table briefly captured below.

These reformist movements often miss the greater

issues beyond just those that affect

**MORGAN
BASSICHIIS**

themselves, like how prison abolition would greatly benefit trans and queer individuals. Prisoners who do not conform to the gender binary are exposed to higher rates of physical and emotional abuse from male prison guards relative to the other prisoners (Girshick).

BIG PROBLEMS	"OFFICIAL" SOLUTIONS	TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES
Queer and trans people, poor people, people of color, and immigrants have minimal access to quality healthcare	Legalize same-sex marriage to allow people with health benefits from their jobs to share with same-sex partners	Strengthen Medicaid and Medicare; win universal healthcare; fight for transgender health benefits; end deadly medical neglect of people in state custody
Queer and trans people experience violence and often come from families, family members, communities,	Pass hate crimes legislation to increase prison sentences and strengthen local and federal law enforcement; collect statistics on rates of violence against queer and trans people	Build community relationships and infrastructure to support the healing and transformation of people who have been impacted by interpersonal and intergenerational violence; join with movements addressing root causes of queer and trans premature death, including systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia



**DEAN
SPADE**

A WORLD WITHOUT PRISONS

With these zines, we understand that readers may not be entirely convinced that abolition is the right action to take with prisons. Our purpose is to help imagine what a world without prisons could possibly look like and bring it into the public consciousness. As Davis has pointed out, everybody will “inevitably consume prison images, whether they choose to or not, by the simple fact of watching movies or TV” (18). Prisons are so ingrained in media and everyday life that it seems impossible to live in a world where they do not exist in the form they do today. Please continue reading zine two, Replace the Prison, for a more detailed account of what an abolitionist-revision world could look like.



REPLACE THE PRISON



WHY PRISONS

Aside from their practical use as aides to capitalism and systemic racism in the U.S., prisons theoretically serve a few beneficial purposes for society:

PUNISHMENT

INCAPACITATION

DETERRENCE

For many, it is common sense that people who commit crimes should be punished. However, aside from the arguments that laws can be unjust and are created by those in power to control certain populations (Gilmore 12), punishment is still not always justified. In a theoretical world where we could otherwise guarantee that someone will not commit a crime again and any victims have been repaid, is there really a need to further punish the individual? From at least a utilitarian perspective, only pain is being inflicted on the punished, without any healthy utility for anyone else.

Incapacitation is often used as a punishment itself in prisons, but there is further motivation for incapacitation. It would benefit society to take genuinely dangerous individuals that are likely to harm themselves or others and hold them somewhere they can be less of a threat. Prisons clearly serve this purpose, but perhaps there could be more humane ways of holding people that truly focus on rehabilitation back into society such as drug rehab, community service, or at least well-funded mental asylums. Finally, one of the most touted benefits of prisons is that their threat acts as a deterrent to crime. This is factually untrue, and the U.S. National Institute of Justice has found that

"prisons actually may have the **opposite effect**: Persons who are incarcerated learn more effective crime strategies from each other, and time spent in prison **may desensitize many** to the threat of future imprisonment" ("Five Things About Deterrence").



Since prisons are not working to stop crimes with fear, we should instead focus on building a world where people do not want to commit crimes. The next few pages will go in-depth into just some of the many systemic changes that can actually prevent crimes and replace prisons.

DRUG POLICY

One easy target for justice reform is to separate the handling of drug abuse from prisons. The criminalization of drugs was heavily exacerbated by Nixon and Reagan's War on Drugs campaign in the late 1900s. Prison (or punishment in general) is, however, not a helpful way to deal with addictive substances that users often have little control over. The state of Oregon used this reasoning to decriminalize small possession of certain hard drugs (Westervelt). It ended up being successful in getting people with addiction on the pathway to the medical help they needed. The main drawback was a lack of strong healthcare infrastructure to actually provide the attention needed to the influx of drug abuse cases. Overall, it is a strong step towards reducing the swollen and racist prison system, and redirecting funding from punishment towards rehabilitation.



SECTION 1. Section 1, chapter 2, Oregon Laws 2021 (Ballot Measure)
read:
Sec. 1. (1)(a) The people of Oregon find that drug addiction and overuse
region and that Oregon needs to expand access to drug addiction and overuse
The people of Oregon further find that a health-based approach
effective, humane and cost-effective than criminal punishment
suffer from addiction is expensive, ruins lives and is difficult.
the Drug Addiction Treatment and Recovery Treatment
ment, treatment and recovery services to those services and to adopt
access to low-level drug possession and to adopt
State of Oregon that screening
is available to all who
is Act! **chapter 2. Oregon**
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EXPANDING TREATMENT
(SB 755-C)

HEALTHCARE

Another system to put into place is strong physical and mental health infrastructure. Improved healthcare will both help resolve the drug problems that often lead to incarceration (like as discussed previously about Oregon), while additionally addressing the issues of mental health more effectively

Further, the U.S.
Department of Justice

“about **37 percent** of people in prison have a history of mental health problems” (qtd. in Stringer 46).



Many of these people may have been less likely to end up in prison if they instead got the mental health they needed. Or at the very least, a punitive prison system will likely not provide them with the help to manage their mental health problems. Here, universal access to affordable healthcare is clearly a preferable alternative to locking away these struggling individuals.



PERESTROIKA

(ECONOMIC REFORM)

A different approach to decrease crime is through economic reform creating more economically fair societies. An Oklahoma justice reform advocate group gathered research showing that some of the greatest contributors to violent crime and especially property crime are *poverty and income inequality* ("How Poverty Drives Violent Crime").



Poverty can lead to crimes out of desperation to survive, and income inequality can lead to frustration that could turn into crime. By implementing policies such as increasing taxes on the wealthy, democratizing the workplace, or increasing social welfare, we can reduce poverty and income inequality. Thus, crime (and subsequently the need for prisons) would decrease

with it.



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